Mayors' portraits are missing?

By BARBARA WROBLESKI

What ever happened to the mayors of Carbondale? Or more specifically, does anyone know what happened to portraits of them that once hung in city hall? Thirty-two portraits were made, but only eight can be found today in the town's municipal building.

The portrait photographs were made as a result of efforts spearheaded by Rebecca Colville, Hendrick Lane, who, in 1951, borrowed pictures of the city's former mayors from their families and had them photographically reproduced as a project for the city's centennial.

The reproductions were placed in identical gilded wooden frames, according to Mrs. Colville, and were hung in the mayor's office in city hall. The centennial took place during the term of the late Mayor William Monahan, who gave Mrs. Colville the go-ahead to conduct the project. Thirty-three mayors served the city prior to Monahan's term, and portraits were made of 32 of them. The first mayor, James Archbald's (1851-55) oil portrait hangs in the mayor's office and was not reproduced photographically.

Today, only eight of that historic collection can be found in city hall, and some Carbondale citizens are searching for them, so far in vain.

Among the most concerned resident is Mrs. Colville, who remembers that the portrait project, done through city funds, took many months to complete, and is upset that the city has lost a valuable part of its heritage. Biographies of the mayors were attached to the backs of the portraits, and have disappeared from the eight pictures now stored in the office of the mayor's secretary.

There's some confusion over when and where the portraits were hung, and when they were last seen at city hall.

And there's also some question that the eight portraits stored in the office to the mayor's secretary are original portraits and not some of the reproductions made in Mrs. Colville's centennial project, indicating that the entire set of reproductions is missing.

The collection was hung in Monahan's office in 1951, Mrs. Colville noted, and also hung in the city hall office of the late Mayor Frank Kelly, who served from 1952-60. Either during or shortly after Kelly's terms in office, the portraits were removed from the walls when remodeling and painting were done in the building. "Evidently no one kept track of where they were stored," according to Rosemary Kelly, widow of the mayor. Mrs. Kelly added that as far as she knows, the portraits are not in the city hall basement.

Former Mayor Frank Howard, who served between 1960-68, remembers that the portraits were hanging in the secretary's office near the mayor's chambers in 1961 or 1962, but were taken down when the painting was done. Howard can't recall how many portraits were there during his terms in office, but he believes they were not taken out of the building. "They should be in the building somewhere," he added.

Sam Cassaro, co-owner of Cassaro-Uram Printing, served as a councilman during the late 1960's and early 1970's, and remembers that the late Mayor Abraham Kaufman had numerous portraits of the mayors encircling the walls of his city hall office. In 1971, Cassaro gained Kaufman's permission to photograph the pictures for a newspaper article, but Cassaro never got around to doing the job. Later that year, Cassaro's term as councilman expired, and he never had occasion again to visit the mayor's office or see the portraits.

City clerk Mary Milligan, who has worked at city hall since 1964, doesn't recall seeing the portraits hanging in city hall, but showed the NEWS the eight portraits stored in the secretary's office off the mayor's chambers. They include those of John Kelly, 1885-89; C.E. Rettew, 1890-92; Eli Hendrick, 1892-95; and J.W. Kilpatrick, 1898-1901. The remaining four were not identified.

John Buberniak, a member of the Committee To Restore City Hall, was at the city hall cleaning the upper levels of the building when the NEWS visited Ms. Milligan. He, Ms. Milligan and this reporter climbed to the third floor of city hall, where the city clerk thought the portraits could be stored, but none were found. The group also checked the building's fourth level, and found nothing.

Pete Judge, former city manager, worked at city hall from 1977 until this past June, and noted that he never saw the portraits hung on walls, but says a few were stored in the office of the secretary to the mayor. He added that the pictures may have been taken out of the building to be copied or cleaned, and possibly were misplaced afterward.

James V. McMyne, who served as mayor for 10 months after the death of Mayor Kaufman, said he found no portraits stored at city hall during his term in office.

S. Robert Powell, president of the Committee To Restore City Hall, commented that the Committee would like to display the historic portrait collection during Pioneer Days in August, and hopes that the missing pictures will be found in time for the event.